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ABSTRACT

In this lesson, students examine issues surrounding hate crimes. Students read and discuss an article on hate crimes. In small groups, students role play state legislators and supporters and opponents of hate-crime legislation who must discuss and vote on a bill designed to increase sentences for hate crimes. Following an overview, the lesson plan details a procedure for classroom implementation, including a focus discussion, reading, "Outlawing Hate," discussion of the reading, and a five step small group activity. The aim of the lesson is to address diversity issues arising from the events of September 11, 2001. The lesson includes a handout, "Making an Action Plan" and 20 additional project suggestions. (BT)

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Constitutional Rights Foundation

Reflecting on September 11

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Fostering Diversity

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Outlawing Hate

Overview

In this lesson, students examine issues surrounding hate crimes. First, students read and discuss an article on hate crimes. Then in small groups, students role play state legislators and supporters and opponents of hate-crime legislation who must discuss and vote on a bill designed to increase sentences for hate crimes.

Procedure

Focus Discussion

Ask students: "If a person murders another person because of his race, culture, religion, or sexual orientation, do you think the person should be punished more severely than other murderers?" Hold a brief discussion.

Reading and Discussion

1. Read Outlawing Hate below.

2. Hold a brief discussion using the following questions:

   - What are hate crimes?
   - How serious do you think the problem of hate crimes is in the United States? Explain.
   - Do you think states and the federal government should pass hate-crime legislation? Explain.

Small-Group Activity--Considering a Hate-Crime Bill

Step 1. Remind students that many states are considering adopting hate-crime legislation. Tell students they are going to role play a legislative session on a proposed hate-crime law. Write the following proposed law on the board:

Anyone who intentionally selected the victim of the crime because of the victim's race, religion, color, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, or ancestry shall have his or her sentence increased by 30 percent over the normal sentence.

Step 2. Divide the class into groups of three. Assign each student in each triad one of these three roles: state legislator, supporter of the bill, opponent of the bill.

Step 3. Have all the legislators, supporters, and opponents meet separately to prepare for the role play. Tell the supporters and opponents to think up their best arguments and tell the legislators to think of questions to ask each side. Tell everyone to refer to the reading.

Step 4. Regroup into triads and begin the role play. The legislator should let the supporter speak first and then have the opponent speak. The legislator should ask questions of both. After both sides present, have the legislators move to the front of the room, discuss the proposed law, and vote. Each legislator should individually state his or her opinion on the bill.

Step 5. Debrief by asking what were the strongest arguments on each side.

Reading--Outlawing Hate

- In 1998, three white men murdered a black man named James Byrd Jr. by dragging him for three miles behind a truck until his body was literally torn apart. The men, all sworn racists, targeted Byrd because he was black.
- In 1998, a young, gay college student, Matthew Shepard, was brutally beaten and left to die entangled in a fence. His murderers chose their victim because of his sexual orientation.
- In 2001, terrorist hijackers believed to be Islamic fundamentalists crashed three passenger planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing thousands. Immediately afterward, attacks on Arab Americans, Sikhs, and others of Middle Eastern and Arab descent increased dramatically.
- In 2002, the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission released a report titled "The Other Victims of September 11." [http://humanrelations.co.la.ca.us/Our_publications/pdf/2001HCR.pdf] The report recorded 1,031 alleged hate crimes, compared with 933 in 2000. According to the *Los Angeles Times* , "the total is the highest recorded since the county began keeping statistics 21 years ago." Of the suspected Los Angeles-based hate crimes, 188 were committed against individuals or groups because of a belief that they were Muslims or of Middle Eastern descent.

Currently 45 states have hate-crime laws. These laws have involved controversy and even court challenges. The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of hate crime laws for sentencing. These laws add extra penalties for any crime committed out of hate. Some of these laws define a hate crime as any crime committed against a person or a person's property motivated because of the person's race, religion, nationality, or ethnicity. Others also include bias against gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Hate Crimes Laws Pro and Con

Since September 11, more states and the federal government are considering adopting hate crime laws. Supporters see these laws as extremely important in our diverse society. They believe hate crimes deeply hurt all levels of the community—individuals, families, groups, and society at large. Hate crimes intentionally send a message that minorities are unwelcome and unsafe. Supporters argue that hate-crime laws will help prevent violence and convey our society's intolerance for these crimes.

Opponents view hate-crime legislation as well-meaning but unnecessary and even counterproductive. They argue that anyone who commits a serious crime is already punishable under current laws. These laws protect everyone equally. They see no reason to pass laws that set up special classes of victims. In addition, they see no need for federal intervention into an area of law that states have traditionally handled. Further, they contend that hate-crime laws will primarily affect those who commit lesser crimes. They believe that sending someone into our overburdened and racist-filled prison system is likely to make them more racist. Thus the law may actually increase hate crimes.

Outlawing Hate

Discussion Questions

- What are hate crimes?
- How serious do you think the problem of hate crimes is in the United States? Explain.
- Do you think the problem of hate crimes has gotten worse since September 11? Why or why not?
- Do you think states and the federal government should pass hate-crime legislation? Explain.

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Taking Action

Overview

Taking Action gives students a step-by-step framework to plan and implement a civic-participation project in response to the events of September 11.

First, students read a story about a group of high school students and teachers who planned and implemented a Middle East teach-in. Second, they brainstorm project ideas and choose a project to work on. Third, they work in small groups to create project plans, compare plans and combine best elements to make a master plan. Finally, they put their master plan to work and evaluate their progress.

Materials & Preparation

Reading: Planning a Teach-In —1 copy for each participant
Making an Action Plan —1 copy for each group
Additional Project Ideas – end of lessons
Brainstorm Tips

Procedure

A. Focus Discussion

Hold a brief discussion by asking "What positive activities did Americans engage in as a response to the events of September 11?"

B. Reading—Planning a Teach in

1. Have students read Planning a Teach-In (see below).

2. Hold a brief discussion using the following questions:

   - What was the problem? What was the goal?
   - How did their goal address the events of September 11?
   - How did they set about achieving their goal?
   - Why did they assign tasks?
   - How did they include the community in their project?

C. Classroom Activity--Project Brainstorm

1. Tell students that--like the students who planned the Middle East Teach-In--they are going to plan a project to address issues arising out of September 11.

2. Conduct a brief discussion by asking:

   - What is the problem you wish to address?
   - What is your goal?
   - Will your goal help you reflect on the events of September 11

3. Use Brainstorm Tips to brainstorm a project list by asking "How do you want to reflect on the events of September 11?"

4. Make a list of project ideas students think are important.

5. Choose a project idea for students to implement with an action plan.

See Additional Project Ideas to help students create their own project plans.

D. Small-Group Activity—Making an Action Plan

1. Divide into small groups. Give a copy of Making an Action Plan to each group.

2. Working in small groups, discuss the questions on the action plan. Write down your answers and be prepared to present your version of the action plan to the other groups.

3. Present your action plan to the others. Discuss which action plans you like best. Combine the best ideas from each group to make a master plan for a civic participation project.

Important! This is a critical moment. Tell students they will probably want to get busy, get out there, and make some waves. But if you don't know where you are going, it will be pretty tough to get there. So, before you put it in gear and spin your wheels, construct a strong, workable plan of action.

E. Action Project—Make It Happen!

Have students put their master plan to work.

F. Evaluation—Stop and Think

You are now in the process of making your action project happen. How is it going? Take a minute to write or talk as a group about the following questions:

1. Does your plan work? Are action steps and tasks being accomplished? Is too much time being spent on some things? Too little time on others?

2. What obstacles have you encountered? How are you solving them?

3 What have you learned as an individual?

Reading—Planning a Teach-In

In the aftermath of September 11, a social studies class in New Jersey realized that they had very little understanding about the Middle East—its people, its history, religions, and why so many of its people harbored such hatred toward America. They also realized that their lack of understanding about the Middle East made it difficult to understand what had happened in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11.

In order to (1) understand the causes and consequences of the terrorists attacks of September 11, and (2) to foster a better understanding about people of Muslim or Middle-Eastern origin, the New Jersey social studies class decided to organize a Middle-East Teach-In.

A *teach-in* is a conference that is designed to gather and share information on a certain topic. During the Vietnam War, students and teachers in colleges, universities, and high schools conducted teach-ins about Vietnam—its history, and culture, America's involvement in Southeast Asia, and options for responding to the war as citizens in a democracy. Since the 1960s, teach-ins have been held on foreign affairs, domestic issues, health, the environment, education, public safety, and dozens of other topics.

A teach-in enlists the aid of experts and participants who are willing to research the teach-in topic. Experts and researchers then gather to present their knowledge and findings to teach-in participants. Debates, panel discussions, and open forums help to broaden understanding and allow everyone to participate. To conduct a Middle-East Teach-In, the class:

1. Gave their project a name that would make it clear to everybody in the school what they were doing—A Middle-East Teach-In.

2. Stated the problem: they didn't understand the Middle East—its people, history, culture, and politics. Lack of understanding created fear and possible intolerance.

3. Created a project goal: to improve understanding of the Middle East to ease fears and prevent intolerant behavior in response to September 11.

4. Wrote a project plan: to outline the subject areas they thought would help improve their understanding of the Middle East.

5. Assigned tasks: to ensure that all subject areas were covered by presentations or discussions, and that the whole school knew when, where, and how the teach-in would be conducted.

6. Found resources and partners in the school and community who knew about the Middle East and would be able to help them conduct the teach-in.

7. Listed obstacles or difficulties that might get in the way of preparing for, publicizing, or conducting the teach-in.

8. Set up an evaluation procedure to measure the success of the teach-in in achieving its goals.

The social studies class invited the entire school to attend. The Middle East Teach-In was such a success that they presented a second version of the teach-in to the community. Hundreds of citizens of all ages attended the community teach-in.

For Discussion

- What was the problem? What was the goal?
- How did their goal address the events of September 11?
- How did they set about achieving their goal?
- Why did they assign tasks?
- How did they include the community in their project?

Brainstorm Tips

Use these Brainstorm Tips to make a list of possible projects to address issues arising from September 11.

1. Describe any and all ideas that come to mind.
2. Work as fast as possible to create a lot of ideas.
3. Write down each idea.
4. Don't reject ideas. There are no wrong ideas in a brainstorm.
5. If you are working with a group, build on each other's ideas.

Handout—Making An Action Plan

You have chosen an action project. Now it is time to create an action plan. Discuss each step and write a clear answer. Each step influences the others. Make sure they all fit together and that they serve the needs and respect the rights of everyone.

Step 1. Project name. Invent a catchy name for your project. Make it something you can live with. You will want to use it on everything connected to the project: flyers, posters, signs.

Step 2. Problem statement. State the problem clearly. How does the problem affect your school or community? What individuals or groups are most affected?

Step 3. Project Goal. What do you want to achieve with your project? Write a one-sentence vision statement.

Step 4. Project Plan. What do you need to do? Write down the steps you will do to accomplish your goal.

Step 5. Tasks. What activities and tasks must you complete to do the project? Include:

- descriptions of meetings
- necessary research
- outreach to experts, government officials, and other potential project partners
- materials needed
- licensing and other permissions required
- locations
- budgets, fundraising

Important! Who will be responsible for each of these activities and tasks?

Step 6. Resources and partners. Who is likely to support your project? List different groups or individuals who can help you.

Step 7. Obstacles. List some obstacles or difficulties you might encounter while doing your project. Who is likely to oppose your project?

Step 8. Evaluation and reflection. How will you measure the success of your project? Be specific.

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Additional Project Suggestions

Listed below are additional project suggestions that may help you 1) plan your own civic participation project or 2) improve a project you have already chosen.

1. Hold a teach-in. Using America Responds to Terrorism as a resource, hold school or community presentations and discussions about topics and issues related to terrorism. Topics could include the history, culture, and geography of the Middle East; how our nation has dealt with previous attacks to its security; issues of security versus freedom, and more. See Planning a Teach-In .

2. Hold a community town meeting. Have students brainstorm and research topics as a preparation for moderating discussions about terrorism-related issues, e.g., national security v. civil rights.

3. Write and conduct a survey. Determine how students or community members feel about America's response to terrorism and post the results at school and in the local media.

4. Draw a map. Create and display a giant map of the Middle East including national boundaries, terrain, cities, and resources. Research and write short descriptions of relevant information and crucial events and attach them to their geographical positions.

5. Design an art space. Create a space for students to paint, draw, and construct their thoughts and feelings about and since September 11. Use the art space as a presentation forum and follow-up to classroom discussions, research projects, town meetings, or teach-ins.

6. Write a play. Following research and discussion about the constitutional issues surrounding terrorism have students create a play about freedom v. national security or other related topics. Present the play to the school and community.

7. Poems, journals and letters. Provide opportunities for written expression about terrorism, including journals. Identify issues and have students write letters of concern to local and national elected officials, local newspapers, or United Nations officials. Create a voluntary forum such as a reading or display for students to share their writings.

8. Gather oral histories. Talk to parents, grandparents, and others from older generations who have experienced previous national and international crises. Ask

them to compare their past experiences to their impressions of the current crisis. Transcribe and display or dramatize oral histories.

9. Locate and arrange to meet with students, teachers, or community members from an Islamic school, advocacy group, or community center to learn about Middle Eastern culture.

10. Form a study group. Meet with other interested students on a regular basis to research and discuss issues surrounding September 11, terrorism, international relations, Middle Eastern politics and culture, civil liberties in time of war, and more. Create presentations or conduct mentoring sessions with younger students.

11. Create a questionnaire and conduct a diversity-awareness survey. This information-gathering activity is a good way to begin other diversity projects.

12. Collect oral histories from people of different backgrounds. Create a book, video, or dramatic re-telling of these histories to present to the rest of the school.

13. Trace all students' foreign-born ancestry and create images that represent each family's origins. Use the images to create a diversity quilt or mosaic and display it in a school hallway or auditorium.

14. Organize ERACISM teams to teach bias-awareness and conflict-resolution skills to younger students, focusing on issues of racial and ethnic conflict.

15. Start a media literacy club to discuss how newspapers, books, films, and television deal with issues of diversity.

16. Form a racially diverse drama club to create sketches and plays dealing with issues of diversity.

17. Organize a multicultural festival featuring the food, clothing, and art forms of various cultures.

18. Create a cultural heritage museum featuring artifacts and history of the diverse races, cultures, and nationalities that are part of your community.

19. Organize a casual conversation club where ESL students and English-only students can meet and converse.

20. Add a second language section to your school paper.

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